



**Above, Pam Steinhaus, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, steadies the center of the canoe while event participants strategically plan how to get into the canoe to avoid tipping it.**

**Below, Lou Ann McCracken, Mississippi River Project, helps an event participant tighten the straps of her life jacket.**



# Dipping your oars

Story and photos by Hilary Markin, Editor

Experiencing the Mississippi River is what the Summer of Paddling 2012 is all about.

On June 7, participants gathered on the shoreline of the Mississippi River at Sylvan Slough to learn paddling techniques and had an opportunity to paddle the River.

"It is a beautiful day," said Sue Clevestine, outdoor recreation planner for the Rock Island District who helped organize the event. "We have a lot of people who are trying paddling for the first time."

The event kicked off at 1 p.m. with various river partners sharing their roles in managing and promoting the Mississippi as a great place to recreate.

"Those of us who live along the Mississippi are lucky to benefit from the expansive bounty provided by the Great River," said Col. Shawn McGinley, commander, Rock Island District. "The Rock Island District has 65 recreation sites, many of which are located on the Mississippi River and all provide a chance to enjoy

nature."

Event participants were provided a brief safety overview about paddling on the river and were all properly fitted with a life jacket before selecting a vessel. In all nearly 60 people dipped their oars, some for the first time while others reconnected with the river seeing pelicans, great blue herons, lily pads and more.

"Paddling really allows you to get close to nature," said Clevestine. "You don't have the roaring engine noise all you hear is the stroke of your paddle and nature around you."

The Summer of Paddling 2012 is a series of events designed to get Americans outside to enjoy the Mississippi River via canoe, kayak or other paddle craft; and to take part in a summer full of paddling events on and near the river. The SOP2012 is aligned with the Presidential Initiative America's Great Outdoors, encouraging people to be active and get outside to experience nature. To learn more visit [www.SOP2012.org](http://www.SOP2012.org).



